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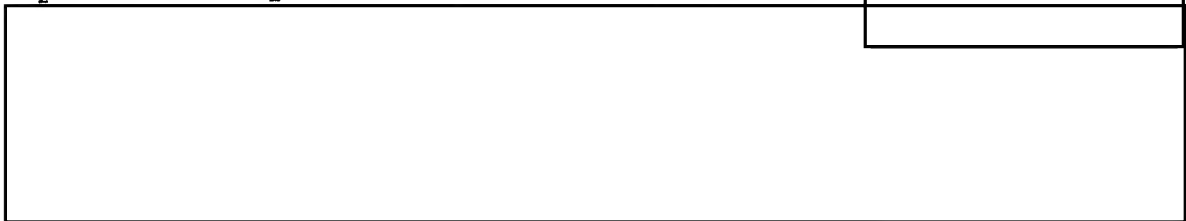
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NORTH KOREA: Pyongyang threatens reprisals if a
pilot held by South Korea is not returned.

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NORTH KOREA: PYONGYANG HAS THREATENED REPRISALS AGAINST THE UN COMMAND IF A PILOT HELD BY SOUTH KOREA IS NOT RETURNED TO THE NORTH.

AT A MEETING AT PANMUNJOM ON 26 MAY, NORTH KOREAN REPRESENTATIVES WERE INFORMED THAT THE NORTH KOREAN PILOT, WHO STRAYED INTO SOUTH KOREAN AIRSPACE LATE LAST YEAR, WISHED TO REMAIN IN THE SOUTH. REJECTING AN OFFER TO VERIFY THROUGH A "DISINTERESTED THIRD PARTY" THAT THIS WAS THE PILOT'S FREE DECISION, THE NORTH KOREANS AT THE MEETING CLAIMED THE PILOT WAS BEING HELD FOR "A FOUL POLITICAL PURPOSE" AND THREATENED THAT THE UN COMMAND WOULD SUFFER "DISADVANTAGEOUS RESULTS" IF HE WERE NOT RETURNED. THE PILOT, WHO HAS BEEN IN THE HANDS OF THE SOUTH KOREAN GOVERNMENT FOR THE PAST SIX MONTHS, WAS SURFACED AT A NEWS CONFERENCE YESTERDAY--AN ACT THAT IS LIKELY TO EXASPERATE THE NORTH KOREANS FURTHER.

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[REDACTED] THE US AMBASSADOR IN SEOUL BELIEVES THESE THREATS, AS WELL AS SIMILAR WARNINGS ISSUED PREVIOUSLY REGARDING ALLEGED US OVERFLIGHTS OF NORTH KOREAN TERRITORY, MUST BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY. HE SUGGESTS THAT PYONGYANG COULD ATTEMPT TO HIJACK SCHEDULED US AIRLINERS FLYING IN EAST ASIA, TO SEIZE SOMEONE AT THE PANMUNJOM CONFERENCE SITE, OR TO CONDUCT A SURPRISE ATTACK ON US PICKET SHIPS IN THE SEA OF JAPAN.

THERE IS NO INFORMATION AVAILABLE SUGGESTING THAT PYONGYANG IS MAKING PREPARATIONS FOR DRAMATIC REPRISALS. GIVEN NORTH KOREA'S PENCHANT FOR SURPRISE--AND SEEMINGLY IRRATIONAL--ACTS OF THIS SORT, HOWEVER, A SUDDEN MOVE AGAINST US CITIZENS OR INTERESTS CANNOT BE RULED OUT.

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